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ABSTRACT

This study examined how Chinese children learn social behaviors in families during early childhood, and examined whether there are differences in social behaviors between Chinese children from Taiwan and Chinese children from the United States. The study also sought to glean strategies for parents, caretakers, and teachers to help cultivate children's prosocial behaviors. Data were gathered from observations of children, and interviews with parents, caretakers, and teachers. Fourteen children ranging from 3 to 7 years of age and their parents, caretakers, and teachers participated in the study. Findings indicated no differences in the prosocial behaviors of children from Taiwan and those from the United States. Parental monitoring and encouragement were found to be key factors for developing prosocial behaviors. Strategies and suggestions to create environments that cultivate prosocial behaviors included the following: (1) parents should assume more responsibilities in educating their children; (2) parents need to show affection and control their temper; (3) parents need to reflect upon their behavior and explain their behaviors to their children; (4) teachers need to recognize children's prosocial behaviors and use the teachable moment; (5) teachers need to teach children to develop understanding of other people's perspective; and (6) schools need to allocate time for children to play and make peers available nearby to increase social interactions. (HTH)

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Learning Social Behaviors in Families during Childhood: A Comparative Study of Chinese Children in Taiwan and in the United States

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Learning Social Behaviors in Families during Childhood: A Comparative Study of Chinese Children in Taiwan and in the United States

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to examine how Chinese children learn social behaviors in families during early childhood. A second purpose was to examine if there were different social behaviors between Chinese children from Taiwan as opposed to Chinese children from the United States. The third purpose was to provide strategies for parents, caretakers, and teachers, to cultivate children's prosocial behaviors. Observations of children and interviews with parents, caretakers and teachers were study methods utilized to collect data. Fourteen children ranging from three to seven years old and their parents, caretakers, and teachers participated in this study. The study found there were no different prosocial behaviors between Chinese children from Taiwan and from the United States. Parental monitoring and encouragement were key factors for developing prosocial behaviors. Strategies and suggestions to create environments that cultivate prosocial behaviors will be discussed.

Learning Social Behaviors in Families during Childhood: A Comparative Study of Chinese Children in Taiwan and in the United States

Linda H. Chiang, Professor of Education, Azusa Pacific University, California

Objectives

The main purpose of this study was to examine how Chinese children learn social behaviors in families during early childhood. A second purpose was to examine if there were different social behaviors between those Chinese children from Taiwan and Chinese children from the United States. The third purpose was to provide strategies for parents and teachers to cultivate children's prosocial behaviors.

Perspectives

Knowledge about child rearing values, attitudes and behaviors among Chinese parents in the United States is limited (Lin & Fu, 1990). There is little research on prosocial behavior among Chinese children. In Chinese society, the term *Chiao-yang* is the most commonly used term in raising children. *Chiao* means education which implies the proper development of character. Though chiao and yang (feed) often are used together, most Chinese emphasis upon *Chiao*.

Early childhood years (3-7) were important times for children's social growth. When a child learns how to think, feel, and behave as a member of a certain group, or act out a particular role, social development is occurring. During early childhood,

social development centers around the individual's relationships with his/her parents, siblings, and playmates. In this process children develop socially appropriate skills of sharing and cooperation, and learn the social norms of the family. The family is the first society in which children will learn and grow. Children learn who they are and what role they play in their environment. According to Erickson and Piaget the first three years of life are when children grow rapidly both physically and mentally. It is also a time when trust and attachment with the society are developed. If children are well taken care of during this time, their intimate relationships with parents, siblings, relatives and friends will help them deal with the outside world. Since a stable personality is found in early childhood, building a healthy environment for children is crucial to the development of children's prosocial behaviors.

Social learning theory proposes prosocial behavior is developed through direct experience or by observing modeled behavior which will occur in the socialization process (Bandura, 1977; Burton and Kunce, 1995). This behavior will continue when it was reinforced (Bandura, 1977; Mazur, 1998). Whiting and Whiting's (1975) study with children aged 3 to 11 years in Kenya, Mexico, the Philippines, India, Japan and the US suggested cross-cultural differences in prosocial behavior were correlated with the children's involvement in the responsibilities of family life. Landers (1991) concluded immediate social circumstances and cultural tradition influence prosocial behaviors.

Human prosocial behaviors are stimulated by empathy which is the capacity to share another's emotional response. Child development researchers identified four stages of empathy development. The first stage occurs during the first year of life.

They will cry at the sound of another infant's cries. The second stage shows in the second year of life when they are capable of understanding another's distress or laughter which is distinct from their own. The third stage occurs between the ages of 3 and 6 years. With the language children can empathize other people's feeling. During this period children can demonstrate comforting behaviors in response to other's distress. The fourth stage happens between the ages of 6 and 9. Children at this stage are concerned about the general conditions of others. They are aware of class of individuals and capable of empathizing with groups of people (Landers, 1991).

The care and protection of children is a practice and an ethic rooted deep in the wisdom and culture of all societies (Devore & Lodon, 1999). A cross-cultural study in the 1990's indicated that Chinese parents tend to teach children to be more reserved and cautious than do U. S. parents (Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992). However, children are also social beings. It is interesting to compare how Chinese children from Taiwan and the United States learn and express empathetic behavior in their families. This study examined Chinese children's prosocial behaviors. Prosocial behaviors include helping, caring, sharing, giving belongings, comforting and cooperating (Lin, 1996). McCay and Keyes (2002) identified children's appropriate social behaviors such as sharing materials, having a sense of fair play, taking turns, using good manners and following rules. In this research questions included: how do Chinese children show their empathy? Are there different empathetic behaviors between genders? Do Chinese children express their empathetic behaviors freely or by

encouragement? And, does culture of their immediate environment impact Chinese children's social behaviors?

Methodology

This research was conducted in fall 2001. Participants were contacted through directors of day care centers and personal invitations. Observations of children and interviews with their parents, caretakers and teachers were study methods applied to collect data. These activities took place at kindergartens, day care centers and at home. Subjects included Chinese children from Taiwan (N=6) and from the United States (N=8). A comparison was made to ascertain if there is different social behavior between these two groups.

Findings

Six boys and eight girls, including four three years old, five four years old, two five years old, two six years old, and one seven years old were subjects. Among them six were from Taiwan (T) and eight were from the United States (US). There were only two parents with high school degrees; the rest of the parents had college degrees. Three children were an only child (2T, I US), nine children had only one sibling (5 T, 4 US), and two had two siblings (1T, 1US). Four children were raised by their Mother (1 T, 3 US), five were raised by their Grandmother (4 T, I US), one was raised by a relative (IT), and four were raised by baby sitters (3 T, 1US). Parents in Taiwan received more assistance from their extended families in Taiwan than their counter parts in the United States.

Prosocial behaviors observed were sharing toys, comforting other children, cooperating with other children, helping with cleaning up, helping with putting toys

away, and taking initiatives. (See appendix 1). Observations from the researcher, parents, and caretakers, found most children shared toys when encouraged (64.3%, N=9). Three children shared toys when requested (14.2%). Most of the children helped with cleaning up when requested (42.9%, N=6). Some parents expressed that children were too young to handle pots and dishes, therefore children did not have many opportunities to distribute food or clean up dishes. One first born boy and a second born girl and boy fought for toys. Three boys and three girls comforted their sibling or mother when their sibling or mother did not feel well. Neither gender nor births order seemed to be the factor influencing prosocial behaviors.

Findings from interviews with parents, caretakers, and teachers indicated children demonstrated empathetic behaviors when encouraged (35.7%, N=5), praised (28.6%, N=4), requested (21.4%, N=3), or reminded (21.4%, N=3). All participating parents, caretakers, and teachers did not think they encouraged children's prosocial behaviors based on gender (See appendix 2 for Interview questions).

This study found there were no different social behaviors between Chinese children from Taiwan and Chinese children from the United States.

Conclusion

There is a rapid growth in the US public schools of Chinese student population. It is crucial for educators to understand how those students learn social behaviors in their families. This paper indicated Chinese children showed empathetic behaviors when encouraged and reinforced. Socializations with children's immediate environment such as sharing family responsibilities enhanced children's prosocial behaviors.

There are old Chinese sayings: "You can tell a person's personality when the child is five years old"; and, "From a three-year-old you can see throughout his/her life." In order to develop constructive citizens it is important to cultivate caring behaviors in children while they are young.

The family experiences of children will determine the direction of their life. Indeed it is important for teachers, caretakers, and parents to create a safe and trusting environment along with close monitoring and praises to cultivate caring and sharing prosocial behaviors.

This researcher collected opinions from these participated teachers and parents and suggested the following strategies to create an environment in which children's empathetic behaviors will be cultivated.

For Parents

1. Parents should assume more responsibilities in educating children.

2. Parents need to show affection and control their temper.
3. Parents need to reflect upon their behavior and explain their behaviors to their children which will allow children to develop understanding of their parents' actions.
4. Parents need to serve as role models, such as saying "thank you", praise more frequently and increase family quality time.

For Teachers

1. Teachers need to recognize children's prosocial behaviors and use the teachable moment.

2. Teachers need to treat each child equitable.

3. Teachers need to be considerate to parents' needs and be a calm third party in working with children and parents.

4. Teachers need to teach children to develop understanding of other people's perspectives.

5. Teachers need to practice daily routines such as saying "thank you".

6. Teachers need to demonstrate positive attitudes.

For Schools or Kindergartens

1. Schools need to allocate time for children to play and make peers available nearby to increase social interactions.

2. Schools need to involve parents in dramas and role playing and share such themes with parents.

3. Schools need to participate in community events.

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Appendix 1

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

1. Setting _____

2. Age Group _____

3. Behaviors	**Frequently**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
a. Sharing toys	_____	_____	_____
b. Comforting other children	_____	_____	_____
c. Cooperating with other children	_____	_____	_____
d. Helping with cleaning up	_____	_____	_____
e. Helping with putting toys away	_____	_____	_____
f. Taking initiative in distributing papers	_____	_____	_____
g. Taking initiative in distributing food	_____	_____	_____
h. Taking initiative in distributing toys	_____	_____	_____

Appendix 2

Interview Questionnaire

1. What is the age of the child _____?

2. What is (are) the parent(s) educational background? ___ graduate; ___college; ___ high school

3. Does the child have any siblings? ___ Yes; ___ No. If Yes, How many siblings? _____. What is the child's birth order? ___ 1st; ___ 2nd; ___ 3rd; ____ Others.

4. Is the child enrolled in kindergarten? ___ Yes; ____ No.

5. Who took care of the child when she/he was young?

____ Grandparents; ____ parent (s); ____ relatives; ____ babysitter; ____ others.

6. Have you observed any empathetic behaviors from this child? Such as

_____ when other child fell or was injured

_____ when her/his pet died or was lost

_____ when someone in the family was ill

____ sharing her/his toys or food with others

7. Are there differences between genders regarding empathetic behaviors? If so, to what extent?

8. Did parents or caretakers encourage/recognize empathetic behaviors? How?

9. Did parents or caretakers encourage/recognize empathetic behaviors more with girls or boys?

10. When crises happened in the family, such as a death of a family member, moving away from one place to another, etc. does the child's behavior change?

11. Did parents or caretakers notice any relationships between birth order and empathetic behavior?

12. In your opinion, what type of environment will cultivate prosocial behaviors? In school? At home?

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